1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

Everyone knows where the boundaries lie between village areas, or between hamlets and other settlements, and there is plenty of land for expansion and for the wandering cattle nomads who traverse the area annually moving their cattle north and south with the coming and going of the rains.

The settlements are all made up of walled compounds and within these are the mud-walled houses with conical thatched roofs, or sometimes grass mat walls with thatched roofs. In the northeast of Bornu the people specialize in a bee-hive shaped house of bound thatch which can be picked up and moved and can reach a size of twenty to thirty feet in diameter, although ten to fifteen feet is more common. A compound is almost always rectangular in shape with mud or grass mat walls and internal partitions. There is only one entrance which is often a house with two doors so that there is a shelter at the doorway for people to gather and visit with the household head. The compounds in any settlement are always arranged in a "U"-shape with the open end towards the west and the closed end on the east. The arms of the U then form the north and south sides of the open plaza where all the major events of town take place. Although in very tiny settlements, big cities, or settlements that have lost a great many people, this U-shape is not often easy to discover, it can be seen by simply asking people where they have their central plaza. When this is pointed out, the questioner knows exactly where to look for the house of the senior political leader of the settlement since his household is always at the bottom of the U in the center facing west. Parenthetically, this means that when individuals or groups pray and bow down toward the east in the open plaza, which they often do, they face the doorway of their local political leader's compound.

Around the villages are fields of millet, the major food staple, guinea corn, ground-nuts, the major cash crop, and numerous specialized crops of vegetables or gourds that vary from place to place depending upon local conditions. Almost everybody does a little farming while goods not produced within the household itself are purchased at local weekly markets that dot the countryside in each of the major villages.

In their culture the Kanuri share ideas about religion, social organization, and subsistence patterns with many of the other peoples of the Western Sudan. Even esoteric items such as pre-pubescent boys' hair styles are shared across wide areas of the southern and central Sahara ranging as far away as Morocco. In their patterns of dress—workshirts and long ground-length robes for men, long shirts and saris for women—they again share many items with surrounding peoples as they do in their love of horses which give a man prestige unless he is one of the few in the cities that owns an automobile. Their language, Kanuri, is not related to other languages of Nigeria, but is shared and closely related to a large group of tongues called Central Saharan that ranges from the Tibesti highlands in northern Chad to Bornu in the southwest and the Darfur region in the modern nation of Sudan, in the southeast. It is a graceful language in which the verb comes at the end of the sentence as in Latin and in which there are many polite circumlocutions for saying things diplomatically. Thus if I wish to say a man is untrustworthy, I do not say it outright. Instead I say quietly that he has narrow eyes, which comes from the saying, "A man with narrow eyes has no shame," he lacks proper respect for his obligations to others. There are many greetings which are adjusted to social rank,

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There are many greetings which are adjusted to social rank, so that one can say "Hello" to a social inferior, to an equal, or to a respected superior, and receive a proper reply recognizing the same distinction. People from other areas of Nigeria and Europeans claim it is a difficult language to learn. But this is probably due to the fact that the most widespread language of Northern Nigeria is Hausa, and many outsiders find they can get along with Hausa in the cities and larger towns without having to make the effort to learn Kanuri. Certainly today most Kanuri school children know some Hausa, and facility with it is spreading throughout all of Northern Nigeria.

Distinctive Kanuri cultural features, things which are of unique Kanuri origin, are not necessarily vitally important things. But they are, if you like, diagnostic features that indicate Bornu-ness in contrast to the cultures of other closely related ethnic groups in the Sudan. Perhaps the most striking feature is the women's hair style. At its most resplendent, it resembles the form of a Trojan helmet made out of an enormous braided ponytail that begins as a crest at the front-center of the head and curves up over the head to end in a slight upward curl of the tail at the back. Today a few of the young school girls are beginning to give up this traditional Kanuri coiffure and are taking on instead the Shuwa-Arab style of a smooth top of the head with hundreds of small braids clinging tightly to the sides and back of the head, at the ends of which are either loose ringlets or a pageboy effect.

Other features which are unique to Bornu are their knives and calabash carvings. These items are also unique to each ethnic group in the region, as are tribal marks cut on the face. Thus many unique features of Kanuri traditional life are thought of locally by many peoples as differentiating criteria for separating one ethnic group from another. A Northern Nigerian going to a market in Jos, or Maiduguri, or Kano, can spot a Kanuri, Fulani, or a Hausa calabash design at a glance just as he can tell another person's ethnic group by his tribal marks, or spot a Bornu knife among a pile of others.

On the other hand, the inside of a Kanuri gentleman's household is not significantly different from the household of a man of similar rank, wealth, occupation, and education, who lives in Hausa country seven or eight hundred miles to the west of Bornu. They dress in a very similar manner, eat very similar food, and share many of the same beliefs and attitudes about what is the best way to live, make decisions, treat one's family, friends, superiors, and worship one's God. Thus although there are some clear-cut diagnostic features representative of Kanuri culture, the people share in a way of life that is practiced by millions in the Sudan, or southern savannah land border of the Sahara desert.

Gathering the Material

I first arrived in Bornu in January 1956 and stayed there until August 1957. My next contacts occurred in the summers of 1964 and again in 1965, and hopefully I shall return in the future to study specialized topics to deepen my understanding of this society as it changes and progresses in the modern world. During our first visit my wife and I spent most of our time in the small village of Magumeri about thirty-three miles northwest of the capital. This was our home base. From here we also visited other parts of the emirate, especially the larger village of

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are available, then try for the best explanation knowing that new facts will very probably force a change in the historical picture you have created to best explain the facts. The greater the number of facts, the fewer the possible number of different historical interpretations that can be applied to any particular case. With these rules in mind let us examine briefly what facts are at hand to help us with Kanuri origins.

First of all we have the Kanuri legends themselves which state that they came originally from Yemen—a legend they share with most of the Muslim people of the western Sudan. Let us call this the local theory and come back to it after considering other available facts. Subsistence farming and cattle keeping came into the area of the central and western Sahara about 5000 years ago, as evidenced by a number of archaeological sites in the area. At that time the Tibesti region north of Lake Chad was much wetter and the lake itself was enormous. It stretched well into the Sahara desert, especially into a region just south of the Tibesti known as the Bodele depression, which even today is well below the present level of Lake Chad itself. People settled in this region and utilized both domesticated plants and animals for their basic means of subsistence. Since that time, however, there has been a steady desiccation of the central Sahara which has dried up the Tibesti and the Bodele depression while the water has retreated in a southwesterly direction towards the present site of Lake Chad. As late as 500 B.C. merchants from Carthage were voyaging to the Tibesti to trade with people who lived in a wet climate among crocodiles, hippopotami, and giraffes.[1] Certainly what evidence we have suggests a very ancient trade between the people of the entire Sahara and those of North Africa. This was much expanded by the introduction of the camel sometime in the first or second century A.D. which facilitated trade across much drier portions of desert and over much longer distances. If we add to this evidence the fact that the Kanuri language is related to the central Saharan group of languages—and these are as a group only very distantly related to all other African language families—then a picture or at least a theory begins to emerge.

The Neolithic agriculturalists in the southern Sahara were drawn further south between 1000 B.C. and 1000 A.D. as the waters of the desert began to recede southward.[2] As they moved southward they pulled the Saharan trade with them, and competition among groups in the Chad basin produced some differences in power and recognized status among clans who lived in the area. Leading lineages within these clans began to unite to govern the activities of clan members until finally the various clans formed loose federations with a leading clan and its leading lineage as the royal or kingly one.[3]

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[1] See Rhys Carpenter, "A Trans-Saharan Caravan Route in Herodotus," *Journal of American Archaeology*, Vol. 60, 1956, pp. 231–42.

[2] This process was also occurring in another area of "desert capture," the upper Niger bend where desert wet regions north of the river receded towards the south. The Niger itself bends into the Sahara, because like the Chad basin there are lowlands to the north of the great bend. Thus it is no accident that the Chad basin and the upper Niger bend have witnessed some of the earliest developments of centralized states in the western Sudan—they were the two areas into which the people of the desert could most naturally and easily move as desiccation proceeded.

[3] In his book on Bunyoro, John Beattie very concisely defines a lineage as "all the descendants in one line (that is, either through males only or through females only) of a particular person through a specified number of generations. It differs from a *clan* in that while usually all the

175 The Shehu of Bornu,
648 however, remains as the religious and political head of the
643 Kanuri people.

C. The Ethnographic Distribution of Peoples in the Area.

• 197 1. Linguistic Classification.

The Kanuri language, according to Greenberg's classification, is part of the Central Saharan language family, one of the twelve genetically distinct language families which he has isolated in Africa. The Central Saharan language family includes Kanuri, Teda, Dazza, Zaghawa, Baele, Bideyat and Berti, all in contiguous distribution. The Kanuri are the southwesternmost extension of this language family. They are almost completely surrounded by people speaking languages of the Chad family. These include: Hausa, Buduma, Kotoko, Mandara, Marghi, and Bolewa. In this solid block of Chad-speaking peoples the Kanuri form a peninsula of Central Saharan speakers, related to
[174] languages far to the northeast. This is in agreement with the historical sources which trace the movement of the Kanuri into Bornu from the area northeast of Lake Chad.

2. The Major Groups.

648 The historical factors which led to the development of the
177 empire of Bornu and determined its relations to neighboring peoples and states are reflected in the cultural distribution of
[171] peoples in the area today. The Kanuri are one of the many Mos-
[179] lem peoples stretching in a wide belt across the Western Sudan.

602 younger brother (kərami) of the child's father, a relative be-
627 longing to the child's dur bube, will avenge the child's death, and under those circumstances the law will not punish the avenger. The kərami of the child's mother will do nothing, for should he avenge the death of his sister's child the law states that he himself may be punished. This seems to be the only case for stating that the dur bube is stronger than the dur chambe.

174 It is extremely difficult to reconstruct earlier Kanuri
611 social organization, and to indicate the changes which it has gone through. It is evident however, that patrilineal descent groups were present at the time of the accounts of Barth and Nachtigal, both of whom spent long periods of time with the Ka-
174 nuri in the nineteenth century. For earlier periods of the history of Bornu, names are given for tribes, and, in the history of federation, conquest and civil strife, these names sometimes have an ethnic or linguistic character; at other times they seem to designate political entities; and again they also resemble clans at times.

192 The Kanuri have a word, jili, which means "kind" or "sort",
563 but can be used specifically for "nation," "people," or "kin
[101] group." A person's jili would first be given as Kanuri; he would then indicate sub-groups of Kanuri--Kanuri proper, Buduwai,
563 Mobber, Manga, Kwoyam etc. These sub-groups today speak dialects
184 of Kanuri which are all mutually intelligible, and no other in-
174 digenous languages. They represent ethnic sub-groups who now
[197] share in the same larger culture, but who may have entered Bornu

GEIDAM

121 individual character, to an entire culture, many times the size of his single community.

The present study is, then, a community study, as must [101] usually be the case in the study of complex societies. The community is the town of Geidam, where the author and his wife lived for one year, from the ending of the rains in 1956 until the rains ceased once again in 1957.

A. The geography and ecology of Geidam.

162 632 Geidam, with its population of 11,032 is one of the largest towns in Bornu Province (see Table 1) and represents urban Kanuri 563 culture. The people of the countryside between Geidam and • 197 Nguru, some 110 miles to the west, are predominantly Manga, a Kanuri sub-group speaking a Kanuri dialect which differs slightly from Kanuri proper. To the east, towards Damasak, are Mobber, 101 197 another sub-group. In the town of Geidam, however, the towns- [369] folk are Kanuri, and speak standard Kanuri. This is primarily because urban Kanuri in Geidam have more in common with urban Kanuri coming from other large towns and cities, and share more with them than they do with the farming peoples of the small villages surrounding Geidam.

131 Geographically, Geidam lies in the northernmost part of the province, in fact, the northernmost part of Nigeria, since the border separating Nigeria from the independent country of 133 Niger is only twenty miles north. The land is a flat sandy [137] plain, with scrub vegetation, which becomes increasingly more

13 Vegetation is open orchard bush with fine-leaved thorny trees predominating over an occasional broad-leaved variety. The terrain although very gently undulating here and there is for the most part flat and low lying (elevation 1,000 feet) with a more or less continuous short feathery grass cover. The loose, deep, easily worked sandy soil is excellent for cultivation while the lack of a thick vegetation cover makes the clearing of new farmland a relatively easy task.

241 The main cereal crop is millet and a considerable amount of guinea corn (sorghum) is grown, especially in the southern portions of the Emirate. In addition to the grain staples, beans, maize, cassava, cucumber, tomatoes, and squashes are also cultivated, while groundnuts 242 are used as the cash crop. In recent years, the agricultural department has been introducing fruit trees into the southern portions of the Emirate and scattering small orchards here and there through the northern bush with the idea of developing a local fruit industry.

101 [197] The people we are concerned with refer to themselves as Kanuri and speak a language of the same name. They call their territory Bornu and sometimes refer to themselves as kam Bornube (the people of Bornu). Among Hausa speakers in Nigeria the Kanuri and their language are known as Beri-Beri, but the Kanuri rarely use this term unless they are away from Bornu.

144 [142] Racially the Kanuri are difficult to place. Like other people at the southern rim of the Sahara they vary from negroid to caucasoid in appearance and in skin colour from coppery brown to very 143 dark. Studies by Chalmers on blood group characteristics have shown 144 that when lumped with other northern Muslim peoples the Kanuri indicate considerable similarity in ABO, MNS, and Rhesus blood groups, to

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177 been left out of the historical accounts of the area or have been played down so considerably that the reader finds it easy to forget that the Sudan is geographically adjacent to the Guinea coast. Lady Lugard[1] set the style for this kind of thinking when she described the Sudan as "facing north". Yet the gold, the slaves, and the lowly kola-nut, which became popular as an article of consumption from Kano to Tripoli, all required well established relationships and contacts between the peoples of the Sudan and those to the south of them from very early times.

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197 Evidence on the early beginning of the Kanuri people is scant. Linguistically they belong to the central Saharan group of languages which extends like a boot into modern northeastern Nigeria, but for the most part takes up the area of the central Sahara, reaching north to include a good portion of Fezzan, all of Tibesti, and stretching eastward in the desert until it meets the Afro-Asiatic group of languages, the so-called Hamito-Semitic group.[2] Greenberg comments on the distinctiveness of the central Saharan group of tongues, and we may safely attribute to them a respectable time depth.[3] Gautier has shown that Lake Chad delivered water into the Bertha region in past times.[4] According to another writer the whole territory northeast of Lake Chad was a great swampy shallow area until the early centuries of the Christian era. This was maintained by the overflow through a river valley (the Bahr el Ghazal) which is now only a dry depression. The surplus Chad water still flows along this passage today beneath the soil.[5] Less than a century ago, Nachtigal saw the first

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(1) Shaw, F.L. (Lady Lugard), A Tropical Dependency (London), 1905, p.3.
(2) Greenberg, J.H., Studies in African Linguistic Classification: IV Hamito-Semetics, SWJ, 6, 1950.
(3) Gautier, E.F., Sahara the Great Desert, (London) 1935, pp.68-69.
(4) Tilho, J. in Geographic Journal LVI, 1920, quoted in Carpenter, Rhys, A Trans-Saharan Caravan route in Herodotus, Americal Journal of Archeology, Vol. 60, 1956, p. 240.
(5) Nachtigal, G., Sahara und Sudan, p. 77ff